



THE FUNCTIONAL CONTENT OF THE EARLY MALADAPTIVE SCHEMAS IN THE EXPLANATION OF BURNOUT AND ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

We describe the functional content of the early maladaptive schemas (EMS) in 3 subjects with different profiles from the point of view of the role of too EMS (Functional dependence and incompetence and models of lack of compassion) in the relationship between stress and burnout and between stress and engagement. The functional contents of the two EMS reveals the structural rigidity that characterizes EMS, by definition, self-perpetuating and quite resistant to change. These EMSs proved to be enduring, appearing to serve as standards for the processing of later experience, constituting themselves as structures capable of generating high levels of dysfunctional emotions with self-defeating and exhausting consequences. EMS seem to be able to interfere with the central needs for self-expression, autonomy, interpersonal attachment, social validation, or societal integration.

KEY WORDS: early maladaptive schemas, stress, burnout, engagement.

INTRODUCTION

In the framework of the cognitive-transactional paradigm, the standard paradigm in the study of stress and coping processes, are usually considered causal antecedents, mediational processes and effects (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999): the antecedents refer to the personal resources and "objective" requirements; mediational processes relate to cognitive assessments of these resources and requirements as well as coping efforts; finally, stress and coping experiences have immediate effects, such as affective and physiological changes, and long-term effects on well-being, physical health and social functioning (Schwarzer and Taubert, 2002).

In the study of professional burnout, the Maslach definition (1976) for aid professionals and later expanded by Maslach and Leiter (1997) to all types of professionals is the one that has the highest consensus and the highest number of citations. The study of burnout as an expression of malaise associated with professional activity was expanded to the understanding of engagement (Schaufeli, Martinez, Marques Pinto, Salanova, Bakker, 2002).

Drawing from the work of Beck and his collaborators, Young (1990, 1999, 2003) developed the notion of Early Adaptive Schemas (EMS), which constitute unconditional assumptions that the individual develops about himself, others and the world, and that guide the processing of environmental information in a dysfunctional way. They are a priori truths, implicit and taken for granted, that condition the meaning of available resources.

Picado, Marques Pinto and Lopes da Silva (2013), demonstrated that functional dependence and incompetence (FDI) and lack of compassionate models (LCM) play a mediating role in the relationship between stress and the dimensions of emotional exhaustion burnout and depersonalization. On the other hand, they found that FDI - EMS acts as a mediator of the relationships between stress - engagement, so that the lower the stress levels, the greater the dedication and force values.

Thus, according to the importance that these EMSs play in these relationships we propose as a central objective to be explored in this study:

- Describe the functional content of FDI and LCM EMSs in 3 subjects with different profiles from the point of view of the role of EMS in the relationship between stress and burnout and between stress and engagement.

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

According to the objective of this exploratory and descriptive study, the methodology used in the interview consisted of verbal reporting and the use of qualitative data analysis procedures (Newman, 1997).

As criteria for the inclusion of the participants, three teachers were selected who in the quantitative study of Picado, Marques Pinto and Lopes da Silva (2013) had obtained: 1) High stress + high EPI from FDI + high burnout; 2) Low stress + low FDI EMS + high engagement; 3) High stress + high EMS LCM + high burnout.

We opted for individual and structured interviews and proceeded to the elaboration of an interview script (Manion, 1994). After informed consent was given, the interview was carried out during November of 2016.

We follow the strategy defined by Yin (1989), which consists of following the theoretical propositions established at the beginning of the study based on the propositions that reflect the research questions, literature review and new insights. We started with a system of previously categories and used deductive procedures according to the box method (Bardin, 1977). The categories included stress, burnout, engagement, and functional content of FDI and LCM (Young, 1990, 1999).

RESULTS:

We present in table 1 the summary of the results of the content analysis of the interviews conducted to the 3 Subjects and, then, a detailed explanation.

Table 1

	Resume of the functional contents of the EMS
Subject 1	Stress, Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Loss of personal fulfillment, FDI, Loss of individuation and autonomy, Subjection, Feelings of incompetence and failure, Guilt and sanction and other negative emotions
Subject 2	Force, Dedication, Efficacy, Functional autonomy, Individuation, Association and Feelings of Competence and Capacity.
Subject 3	Stress, Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, Loss of personal fulfillment, Inflexible efforts of achievement, Lack of compassion; Unrealistic expectations and negative emotions.

The content analysis allows us to verify the possibility that in subject 1 the high scores in FDI contribute to the association between stress and the three dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of personal fulfillment). Effectively, the functional content of this scheme refers to the subject's belief that he is unable to handle day-to-day responsibilities in a competent and independent manner. The subject with this scheme often seems to depend on the help of others in an exaggerated way in areas related to the need for decision making and the beginning of new tasks.

According to the content analysis, we can see, in subject 2, some of the principles established in the literature on engagement. Thus, he shows himself to be energetic by promoting a positive connection with work activities, facing himself as capable of meeting the demands of the profession. This view of itself is inverse to the functional content of the functional dependency scheme and incompetence. In this way the low-scoring individual in this scheme sees himself as capable of dealing with day-to-day responsibilities in a competent and independent way.

Finally we can verify the possibility that, on the one hand, subject 3 with high scores in the EMS of MLC manifests high relations between stress and burnout. Recalling, once again, an analysis of the functional content of the schemes, we find that this scheme translates the subject's belief in having to strive to realize the high expectations created for himself at the cost of joy, pleasure, health, sense of accomplishment or satisfactory relationships. Thus, these results seem to indicate that when the subject strives permanently to realize the high self-created expectations, he may develop states of stress associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and loss of personal fulfillment.

Within the framework of Young's (1990) theory on EMS, we can describe the

role of FDI and LCM schemes in the relationship between stress and burnout as follows:

1. Potentially problematic situations lead to increased levels of stress that in turn contribute to the activation of EMS;
2. Automatic negative thoughts related to the functional content of the EMS emerge;
 - 2.1. Belief of the subject that is incapable of dealing with day-to-day responsibilities in a competent and independent way - FDI Scheme;
 - 2.2. Belief of the subject in having to strive to fulfill the high expectations created for himself - LCM Scheme.
3. The subject acts in order to try to confirm the EMS;
4. When the experiences do not allow the confirmation of the EMS, the stress levels increase (potentially problematic situations have become problematic situations) and with them the symptoms of burnout increase.

CONCLUSIONS:

The functional contents of EMS (FDI and LCM) are in agreement with Young's (1990, 1999) characterization for these schemes. This situation would be expected due to the structural rigidity that characterizes EMS, by definition, self-perpetuating and quite resistant to change. These EMSs proved to be enduring, appearing to serve as standards for the processing of later experience, constituting themselves as structures capable of generating high levels of dysfunctional emotions with self-defeating and exhausting consequences. EPMA seem to be able to interfere significantly with the central needs for self-expression, autonomy, interpersonal attachment, social validation, or societal integration.

It relevant to understand the results in light of the five primary items that Young (1990) considers to be underlying the development of emotional well-being, namely: autonomy, association, appreciation, reasonable expectations and realistic limits. Thus, Subject 2 of our study reveals an adaptive construction of these five functional dimensions. Subjects 1 and 3 reveal dysfunctional constructs of the five dimensions mentioned.

As final considerations, we emphasize that intervention at EPMA level may be a relevant way to adopt interpretations and functional coping patterns, namely from the point of view of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, vigor and engagement. The results obtained put the problem of the prevention of burnout and the promotion of engagement in the framework of relations between EPMA, feelings and attitudes. Finally, we would like to emphasize the contribution of the results found to an understanding, extended to personal variables (EPMA), of the impact of professional stress on workers' uneasiness / well-being. Thus, it seems fundamental to include in the programs for prevention / action of burnout, an intervention with the workers, directed to the promotion of intervention strategies at the level of the EPMA and promoter of well-adapted interpretations.

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